



Pogsara Yia!

(Girls First!)



FINDINGS FROM THE NAVRONGO HEALTH RESEARCH CENTRE
FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION ERADICATION INTERVENTION

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Navrongo Health Research Centre

ON THE VERGE OF EXTINCTION

Circumcisers are becoming increasingly rare to find. But the *Pogsara Yia!* team stumbled upon one recently. It took 1hr 52 mins to successfully split his mind into two... Share his perspectives on key issues in notes 8, 9, 10 & 11

Why do you think circumcision is practised at all?

Circumcision is basically a rite of passage - from adolescence to adulthood. It is also to prepare girls for marriage. In Kassena-Nankana country culture a boy and a girl are not supposed to 'know' one another until they are married. So if either of them feels a strong urge to 'do it', the girl may get cut to pave the way. Mothers are always the first to start it all. Because our culture respects life on earth and the hereafter, both men and women ensure that their offspring are able to be of service to them both on earth and in the hereafter. Rites of passage during funeral performance become very important. A girl who is not circumcised is considered a man and cannot carry her mother's pot, which is usually broken by the way side as a sign of her mother's last lap to eternity. Some women are known to blackmail their daughters who refuse circumcision by claiming it is because the girls don't respect or love their enough to want to carry their pot as the last show of respect at the final funeral rites of their mother. Such girls are known to submit



Obsolete customs are being isolated - it's only a matter of time before female circumcision is no more

So are we ever going to see the end of circumcision?

Oh yes. Customs are dying out on their own and others are being pushed into extinction. It is no longer uncommon to see girls who are not circumcised perform their mothers' final funeral rites. The ancestors have not rejected it. So that is no longer an excuse.

Are you helping in efforts to eradicate FGM?

Very much so. When I was an Assemblyman I spearheaded the campaign and my father stopped but when I stepped down up and travelled a little he resumed and got caught. As an FGM facilitator in the community I am happy to be helping in eradicating FGM.

How did you become a facilitator for the NHRC FGM eradication project?

It was at about May in 1998. NHRC was recruiting people for FGM eradication and the Chief of Sirigu recommended me to join the team. We were just simply asked to come for training to become community leaders and mobilize communities for social action. The NHRC team had specifically asked that an Assembly member be added to the team. Though I was no longer an Assembly member the Chief added my name to the list.

Why then did he select you?

I had run a lot of errands for him in the past and he knew what I was capable of. It was only at the NHRC that were told we were being recruited for FGM activities. I could not have been more excited.

In your community today, which of them has a better chance of finding a husband, a circumcised woman or a non-circumcised women?

Both have equal chances



Akurugo Atami-duko has seen a lot in life but says has never witnessed a circumcision procedure

Has anyone ever rejected a woman because she was not circumcised?

Not that I know of.

Have you ever witnessed a live circumcision procedure?

No. I have not. I can't stand it.

But you used to assist your father when he was at work, did you not?

I used to be in-charge of carrying his bag and equipment when I was young. I was also responsible for preparing millet flour for the girls to drink shortly after they have been cut so that they will be strong enough to walk home.

I hear circumcision is still practised in your area now. Who is doing it?

No. Not in my area. But I would not rule out the possibility of people crossing the border into Burkina Faso to do it. The disturbing thing about circumcision is that it is so secretive that a girl can be circumcised in your house and not many people in the house would get to know it until much, much later. Even if they know they just would not talk about it. Circumcision may be one of our best kept secrets now

How, in our opinion can the practice of female circumcision be eradicated?

By encouraging girls' education. In fact, by promoting education across board, for both boys and girls. Community sensitisation must be intensified. In this regard I do my hat for the work that the Navrongo Health Research Centre is doing. It is also important to assist circumcisers live decently so that they don't have to cut girls to survive.

And the law?

The law cannot arrest someone because he is a circumciser. The law deals with evidence. What really is the importance of the law if the circumciser is arrested only after he has cut the girls?



Typical compound in Sirigu

Send questions or comments to: Pogsara Yia!

Navrongo Health Research Centre, Ghana Health Service, Box 114, Navrongo, Upper East Region, Ghana

Pogsara_Yia@navrongo.mimcom.net